

Groundwork

by Sonic Serendipity

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Summary: The signs we saw had to come from somewhere. The foundation for Corny and Maybelle's fascinating relationship get laid down and built upon. --CornBelle. Duh. Little vignettes.

1. Chapter 1

A/N Here they be again. This time in a series of snippets chronicling the progression of their relationship.

I've had a thought about the future, should the sparktastic couple inform me that they're 'gonna elope if I don't wed them properly, dangit'. I'm pretty sure that the anti-miscegenation laws didn't get repealed in Maryland until the federal decree in (I think) 1967. So Penny and Seaweed should be fine, but what about poor Maybelle and Corny? They're not getting any younger. They could get married in Pennsylvania circa 1964ish, I think...hmm.

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The first time they met, Corny Collins was just wrapping up a show. Maybelle recognized his attractive voice from the TV show, and was surprised how puny he was in real life. His pleasure in meeting her seemed genuine, and he smelled of hairspray and male sweat and something vaguely citrusy. She respected him for the lack of a heavy, noxious cloud of cologne almost as much as she did for his total lack of hesitation in shaking her hand.

Corny liked the way her height made him stand up straight, and how white her smile was against her dark skin. Watching her eyes twinkle when she laughed at something he said was almost as pleasant to the eye as her rich, velvety chuckle was to the ear. He wondered what her singing voice was like.

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They saw each other several times over the next few weeks, as preparations were made for the first 'Negro Day'. She was very, very busy with arranging everything, but he somehow found time to get acquainted with something of her tastes; during her first commercial break, when she went off-camera and let the makeup girl powder her, he was standing there bearing that ridiculous face-splitting smile and a glass of sweet tea with just the right amount of sugar. Her mind was stuttering at finding him there, but her hands moved to take the drink without requesting any input from her brain. She took a sip, blinked at finding it exactly right, took a bigger drink and looked at him curiously. "What are you doing here?"

He spread his hands towards the stage. "Watching the show. It's much better in person than on the screen. Your kids are doing great."

"Thank you." She fell silent, sipping her drink and studied him intently as he said something to the cameraman. Then commercial break was ending, and he was there to take the glass from her. He nodded in the direction the makeup girl had gone and winked at her.

"Never let 'em see you sweat, Maybelle." Then he was off somewhere out of the spotlight and they were broadcasting again.

When the show was over he came forward to congratulate them all on a good performance. He clasped Maybelle's hand, and gave high-fives to a few of the more out-going boys.

Afterwards, Maybelle suspected that a few of the more discerning girls were a little sweet on the show host. He didn't notice and she didn't say anything.

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Next time they had to meet for something she tried to return the favor. However he had discovered her preferred beverage, she had to do a little investigative reporting.

It was worth it when he came to meet her in his office and found her with a bottle of cold raspberry lemonade. He was a hard man to surprise, and she enjoyed the challenge.

In later days she discovered that she also enjoyed making him happy. He was one of those people who expressed enthusiasm in fidgeting with small items, bouncing around a bit, and embellishing his words with illustrative gestures. She suspected that if it weren't for societal norms and rules of propriety she would find him to be a tactile and physically affectionate person, and sympathized with him on that score.

Then again, she liked the way he compensated with his voice. It could become caressing at the drop of a hat, and Maybelle was an intimidating woman who didn't get flirited with enough.

Not that he could have articulated that that was why she needed to be flirited with more. If asked, he would have said that there was no such thing as too much appreciation of Maybelle, and he was evening

the tally in any way he could.

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NEXT UP: Well, I'm not entirely sure. But I think Maybelle meets Link, Corny meets Inez, the adults bond over music preferences and Velma-hate, and Maybelle gives ol' Rory parenting advice. We'll see if that's how it really goes. .

2. Maybelle, meet Link

A/N I finally got to see Hairspray in the theater again. The first time is of course for the big view, so this time I got to focus on the smaller parts--like Corny and Maybelle. It was quite inspirational. I am a little bit in love with James Marsden. /nods sagely/

And there isn't everything I was thinking of putting in this chapter, but it is over 800 words (1203, in fact) just for Nor. So I hope you appreciate it. /teehee/

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"Oh, I'm sorry, ma'am!"

Maybelle smiled down at the boy amiably, and helped as he scrambled to pick up her scattered papers. "That's fine, dear. Don't worry yourself." He was an impressively good-looking boy, with dark hair and blazing blue eyes. He was also no older than her own son, which made his presence here on a Saturday rather odd. "What are you here for, honey?"

He shuffled his handful of papers into rough order and looked her squarely in the eyes--still somewhat chagrined, but boyishly brave. "I just got hired, ma'am. I'm getting shown around and rehearsed." He held out the sheaf of papers and she took them lightly.

"Thank you. Well, congratulations! Takes some talent to get on the show. I look forward to seeing you."

He grinned a blinding white smile. "Thank you. It was a pleasure to meet you." He straightened, and offered a slim young hand. "Link Larkin."

She took his hand. "Maybelle Stubbs, but you can call me Ms. Maybelle." His name would tend to suggest otherwise, but the looks and the smile and the easy charm demanded that she ask: "Are you by any chance related to Mr. Collins, Link? You favor him," she added, in case he thought she was implying some sort of favoritism.

He blushed rather appealingly. "Oh, no, ma'am--uh, Ms Maybelle. No relation. We only just met this week; he found me at a dance, and apparently some of the other kids has recommended me." If he was

going to say anything else, it was silenced by the appearance of the man himself. Corny Collins strode over upon seeing them, and plucked the folder from her and tucked it under his arm so as to clasp her hands.

"Maybelle! You look as radiant as ever."

She freed her hands gently and laughed at him. "You're an incorrigible charmer, Corny."

He winked. "And you're welcome to encourage me all you want." With this shameless pun, he turned to the lanky boy and laid a friendly hand on his shoulder. "Link, how are you? Have you been abandoned?"

Link shook his head. "No sir," he said respectfully. "Mr. Morgan went to lunch, and I said I'd rather get used to the place than go home."

"Well, are you used enough to be able to find my office?" Corny waited for the nod, and then grinned at him. "Excellent. Why don't you wait there for just a few minutes while I talk with Ms. Maybelle, and then I'll give you whatever part of the tour you missed out on."

"Yes, sir." Link smiled at the stately black woman. "It really was a pleasure to meet you, ma'am." She smiled back and he left, although not without a slanted backward glance that Maybelle saw and Corny didn't.

"Maybelle?" She turned her attention to Mr. Collins, who was looking at her curiously. "I hope he didn't bother you."

"Oh, no. He seems like a lovely boy. He said you discovered him just this week."

Corny nodded, hopping up to perch on the edge of the podium they used during the show. "Yep. Bright kid, very talented, and not stuck-up about it--which is rare. Good heart, which is even rarer."

And that was another thing they shared. The resemblance really was eerie. "I thought at first he might have been your son." His eyebrows shot up, and she shrugged before leaning on the opposite end of the podium. "He looks more than a bit like you, Corny." He had on that expression of impishness poorly hidden under a veneer of innocence that meant that some teasing was incoming. She remembered the boy's backward glance, and decided to cut it off. "And I got the distinct impression that he didn't mind the idea a bit."

Ha! That did it. His legs stopped their slight movement and he blinked at her. She savored the triumph of puncturing his trademarked imperturbable ease, and stored away his expression for future ammunition. He cleared his throat: "Um, excuse me?"

She straightened up and smiled a little smugly at him. "I don't know what the situation with the child's father is, if he has one, but certain behaviors seem to indicate that he is seriously considering electing a certain someone with the last name of Collins to the position."

He grinned weakly. "One of my brothers?" She merely raised an eyebrow at him and he wilted. "What makes you think that? And are you sure?"

"A definite air of worshipful respect, and pretty sure." He groaned and slid his hands over his face, and she abandoned her position of triumph to draw closer and tap his knee for attention. "Hey. Corny. What's the matter if the boy looks up to you?"

He splayed his fingers and looked at her from between them. "I'm pretty set in my ways as a bachelor, Maybelle. I don't know how to deal with kids unless they're employees, or nieces and nephews at least several states away. What am I supposed to do if one of the kids adopts me?"

"Well, that you're willing to address the idea instead of laughing it off is a good first sign." She backed away to make room as he slid back onto his feet, then squeezed his shoulder in commiseration. "Don't worry about it too much, honey. You're good with teenagers, from what I've seen; you know when to be friendly and when to be the adult in charge. Just add 'willing to listen' to that list and you should do fine with your new fan." She chuckled as a thought hit her. "Oh, and he's a teenage boy, so don't be afraid to smack him upside the head if he does something stupid."

"As a former teenage boy, I can understand the reasoning behind that." He cocked his head at her with frank curiosity and she was suddenly reminded of the greyhounds her uncle used to race, all long lean legs and coiled energy. She wondered if he used to be a runner. "But how do you know? Do you have a son? I didn't know you had family."

"Ohh, yes. Two; Simon, who's fourteen and insists on being called 'Seaweed', and little Inez." She could see him politely and manfully attempting to suppress his curiosity and took pity on him. "Their father passed away five years ago, God rest his soul."

His blue eyes were suddenly dark with sympathy, and he made an abortive gesture as if to hug her before stopping himself. "I'm so sorry for your loss," and he was compensating with his voice again for the lack of touching and the genuine warmth made her smile softly at him

"It's alright, Corny. He was a good man, but we get by." She eyed him contemplatively. "He would have liked you, I think. Isaac had a good feel for character."

He looked pleased all out of proportion to the compliment. "That's great to hear." She furrowed her brow in confusion, and he gallantly offered her his arm as they stepped down from the slight platform. "Maybelle, any man you would pick as your husband and the father of your children is someone I want on my side."

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These guys are really getting out of hand. I didn't know that Link

looked up to Corny like that. This is what happens when you start speculating about characters only broadly sketched out in the source material. /disbelieving shake of head/ Oy. Next thing you know Corny's gonna say he's got ten brothers and sisters._

...what's that you say, Rory?!

_/_headdesk/_

3. L'il Inez

A/N: BEHOLD, I EMERGE FROM THE DEPTHS. Cheering may now commence.

I'm sooo rusty with these guys. Please let me know if something is off. It's hellweek, with finals approaching, so I'm not likely to update any time soon. I hope you guys enjoy this. /thumbsup/

(I might get Hairspray for Christmas ohboyohboyohboy/fidgets/)

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"What's the matter, Maybelle?" She looked flustered, and Maybelle Stubbs never looked flustered. She sighed, a little ruefully.

"We have that big dress rehearsal in two days, but I haven't been able to find someone to look after my little girl. I hate to leave her alone all that time..."

"Well..." he wasn't sure his offer would be looked on favorably, but he decided to risk it: "You could just bring her, if you want." He quickly added, "I know you're gonna be busy with the other kids, but I'm just doing paperwork in my office. I wouldn't mind keeping an eye on her, if she doesn't mind sitting around and being pretty quiet."

Maybelle looked at him levelly. He squirmed a little inwardly at that penetrating gaze, but on some level he enjoyed it. Maybelle was always polite, always friendly...she even put up with his flirting with good humour. But there was usually a cool distance that she kept up, and he treasured the little moments of connection.

Even if it was a connection that meant that she seemed to be looking right through him.

"Are you sure you won't mind, Mr. Collins?"

He inhaled, slightly belatedly. "No, not at all!" He grinned slightly. "If she was a hooligan I might, but I know you well enough to be sure that no child of yours is gonna be a hooligan."

She grinned crookedly at that, dark eyes sparkling. "That's the truth."

(sometimes he liked to pretend that she was playing hard to get. But that would mean that he was romantically interested and that she returned the interest, and, well...that just didn't seem plausible.)

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"This is Inez. Inez, say hello to Mr. Collins."

"Hello," she said shyly. He smiled at her, more gently than was his wont, but didn't think she saw.

"Hi there, Miss Inez. I hear you're going to be keeping me company?"

She looked up a little bit, and cast a slight questioning glance at her mother. "Yes, sir." She had a slight lisp; 'yes sir' sounded more like 'yeth, thir'. When she worried at her lower lip, her missing baby teeth were visible (or, to be more precise, not visible).

Corny Collins was thoroughly charmed.

Maybelle was giving her daughter last-minute instructions. "Now, if you need something ask Mr. Collins. If it's something you can't do, Mr. Collins, please come get me."

"Of course."

She straightened and smiled at them. He smiled a little himself, thinking about how mismatched was the pair she was looking at. "Y'all behave yourselves."

"Maybelle!" Corny drew himself up and looked affronted. "I will have you know I am a paragon of virtue."

"Well, go be a paragon somewhere else," she laughed.

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He found himself glancing up from his paperwork more than he was looking down at it. Inez was sitting in the ratty loveseat against the far wall, looking small and out-of place with her dark little hands folded primly in her lap. She didn't look comfortable, and he was pretty sure that as active as teenagers are, little children are generally more so. "Do you want something to do, sweetheart?"

She looked up, like a deer caught in the headlights. "I'm fine, sir. Thank you."

He gave up the pretense of work, and sat back in his chair, looking as harmless as possible. "I've some spare paper and pencils here, if you want to do some drawing. Or if you prefer to help me with my work, you can put some of these papers in file folders for me." She looked like she was wavering, and he let a hint of puppy eyes creep out. "Please, Inez? I'm worried your mama might be mad at me if she finds out you had nothing to do all this time."

"Mama only gets mad if it's real important," she said. He laughed.

"She does at that. Still, do you think you could help me?"

She finally came over, little body held straight as an arrow. She was a little nervous, but he saw her mother in the determined tilt of her chin. With only a few directions, she was soon helping him with

organizing his files and writing labels in childish but perfectly legible hand.

"Do you get along with Simon...Seaweed okay?"

Inez nodded, and took the packet of paperclips out of her mouth before responding; "Yes. He's a lot older than me, but he's a good brother."

"Sure seems like one." He leaned a little closer and said confidentially, "I am the tenth of eleven children, so I know what it's like to be the youngster in the family."

Her eyes widened and her mouth dropped open. "Eleven?" she squeaked in a really quite adorable voice.

He nodded solemnly. "Eleven. I wouldn't imagine it wasn't easy on my parents, but they had the hang of it by the time I came around." He balanced a pen on his fingertip absently. "Besides, my mom was SuperMom. A lot like yours, really."

Inez looked skeptical that anyone could be as great as her mom, but let it slide. "Were you a good boy?"

"Inez!" he said in a scandalized voice, delighted that she was loosening up enough to tease him a little. "As I have said before, I am a paragon of virtue! And I was just a virtuous throughout my childhood."

She gave him a pint-sized version of her mother's 'I-don't-believe-you' look. "If you say so, Mr. Collins."

"Well, I do, Miss Inez. So there." He lobbed a pencil shaving at her, and she stuck her tongue out at him.

When Maybelle came in a few hours later, she found them working in friendly silence. "How are you two getting along?"

They both looked at each other, then grinned at her. "Fine," they chorused. "She's been very well-behaved," Corney added approvingly. Inez glowed.

When his two lovely ladies left the office, Inez gave him a drawing. He thanked her warmly, and was fairly sure that his look of melted besottedness didn't escape her mother, who left with thanks and a fond, knowing look.

Drat those Stubbs women, anyway.

4. Sincerity

A/N Quite short, this came upon me at three in the morning. It is kind of pointless, but I am nonetheless rather fond of it. I would like constructive criticism very much, although I certainly wouldn't object to shameless gushing either.

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"I still say it could do with more of a jazz feel."

She rolled her eyes fondly. "You think everything could use more of a jazz feel. If Mozart played for you you would complain that he was too structured." He grumbled in an absent way, and she added slyly: "I still don't see how you don't go crazy with the same introductory song every day."

"Same way I am not driven insane by the same unstructured teenagers every day."

"How's that?"

"Short attention span and a good imagination."

Maybelle laughed delightedly and he grinned up at her. (it was clearly unexpected; it was his crooked unpracticed natural smile instead of the one for the cameras.) "I've been meaning to ask you, Mr. Collins; how is Link working out?"

He shrugged, pushing his reading glasses back up his nose. "Quite well. Lot of talent...and pretty good work ethic when driven to have one."

"And the..." she twirled a finger vaguely in the air-- "other thing?"

"Still unnervingly respectful to me, yes."

"Honey, the day will come when you will think wistfully of these glorious times when that boy listened to you."

They had just got stuck back into the score when there was an unpleasant interruption.

Velma von Tussle.

The exchange was brief, and entirely lacking in wit and substance--at least on Velma's side. Suffice to say that quiet venom was released, Motormouth Maybelle was entirely serene, and Corny Collins was either totally absorbed in his work or just simply ignoring the exchange.

Maybelle looked after the departing manager calmly. "Do you know, I don't think she likes me."

"It's because she's jealous of your beauty, talent, and ability to hold a man's attention when she can't," he said around the pencil in his mouth.

"Not used to holding anybody's attention 'round here in a way she'd envy."

He blinked up at her like a myopic owl, his dark hair awry where he'd distractedly ran his hands through it. "Ms. Stubbs, if you don't fit a man's standards of what is appropriate or beautiful, he will adjust his standards--if he has any kind of sense at all."

Apparently not needing a response to this simple bit of common sense, he bent back over the pages, and Maybelle smiled gently at him, feeling a little misty. Any man could flirt, and he was better than most; but before his childlike flashes of utter sincerity she was increasingly helpless.

Best not to let him know. Corny Collins was persistent, and he tended to get the things he devoted his considerable energy too--if he decided to secure her affections, for whatever reason, she might be in trouble.

But then again, she was stubborn too.

"And do you have any kind of sense at all?" she asked lightly.

He pulled off his glasses and grinned. "Enough to know that I'd be silly to claim my standards ever needed adjusting."

"Very smooth," she approved.

"Glad you like." The ridiculous man's inability to stay still held true, and she suppressed an affectionate sigh as the earpiece of his glasses found its way into his mouth. "Although you do have a way of fooling with a man's perspectives, Maybelle."

"Oh?"

"Yep. I escorted a lady to her car the other day. Tiny little thing, delicate as a flower." He waved his glasses demonstratively. "When I took her arm, I sincerely thought she was going to break. It was more unsettling than the kids' hero worship."

"Thanks." I think, she considered adding, but decided against it. He deserved to wrap up a conversation uncontested every now and again.

End
file.